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## THE ILLINOIS EDUCATIONAL COMMISSION

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At the meeting of the Illinois State Teachers' Association in December, 1907, a resolution was passed urging the General Assembly to authorize the appointment of a commission to investigate the organization of the public-school system of the state and to report its findings and its recommendations to the next Assembly. This resolution was strongly indorsed by Governor Deneen in his message to the Forty-fifth General Assembly, and resulted in an act which empowered the governor to appoint an educational commission to consist of six persons representing the various phases of educational work within the state. The Act provided that the state superintendent of public instruction should be chairman *ex officio* of the commission, and also that the commission should elect a secretary. The following members were appointed by the governor in December, 1908: President E. J. James of the University of Illinois, President R. E. Hieronymus of Eureka College, President Alfred Bayliss of the Western State Normal School, Superintendent Edwin G. Cooley of Chicago, Superintendent A. F. Nightingale of Cook County, and Principal Harry Taylor of the Harrisburg Township High School. Professor Ira Woods Howerth of the University of Chicago was elected secretary of the commission.

The amount of work which the commission accomplished during the ensuing year is indicated by the seven bulletins<sup>1</sup> which record the data collected and embody the recommendations to the Assembly.

<sup>1</sup> The Illinois Educational Commission, Springfield, Illinois, 1908-1909: Bulletin No. 1, *A Tentative Plan for a State Board of Education*; Bulletin No. 2, *The County Superintendency*; Bulletin No. 3, *A Tentative Plan for the Certification of Teachers*; Bulletin No. 4, *A Tentative Plan for Making the Township the Unit of School Organization*; Bulletin No. 5, *Tentative Recommendations concerning County Teachers' Institutes*; Bulletin No. 6, *The General School Law of Illinois as Revised, Simplified, Condensed, and Codified by the Illinois Educational Commission*; Bulletin No. 7, *Tentative Recommendations in Regard to Minimum Salaries for Teachers*.

In order to appreciate the true significance of this work it is essential to understand the unique and, one might almost say, anomalous condition of educational organization in Illinois. The adjective *decentralized* only inadequately characterizes this condition. The "district" unit of the northern states and the "county" unit of the southern states are curiously combined with the "township" unit so as to form, not a unified school system in any sense of the term, but rather an unwieldy collection of independent elements. At basis, the "organization" may be said to follow the "district" plan. Each district has its own board of directors, which controls and manages the schools within the district; but the township board may divide or consolidate districts upon petition of the voters. The county, through the county superintendent, has come to exercise a supervisory function in connection with the districts within its borders, and the delegation of the certificating power to the county superintendent makes this supervision peculiarly effective. Finally, through the superintendent of public instruction the state exercises a general supervisory function over all schools, but the powers of this officer are closely restricted, and consequently the directive influence which the corresponding official can exert in a centralized system is little felt in the schools of Illinois.

The commission maintained from the outset that its chief function was to remedy this condition—to bring some measure of system and order into the educational machinery of the state. Bulletin No. 1, *A Tentative Plan for a State Board of Education*, is the result of its first effort in this direction.

Illinois has no state board of education, nor does the office of the state superintendent of public instruction fulfil the functions which such a board fulfils in most states. The commission recommended a board of nine members, eight of whom were to be appointed by the governor, the state superintendent of public instruction, and the chief justice of the supreme court; the ninth member being the state superintendent himself, who was to act as *ex officio* chairman of the board. The eight members were to serve for eight years, and were to be intrusted with the following powers:

1. To have general supervision and inspection of the public schools, including the educational departments of the state charitable and reformatory institutions.

2. To make rules for the distribution of any part of the state school fund set aside to assist and encourage schools.

3. To prepare and distribute plans and specifications for the construction and equipment of schools.

4. To prepare all questions for teachers' examinations, to grade all examination papers, and to prescribe all rules and regulations necessary to carry into effect the provisions of the law in regard to the certification of teachers.

5. To propose plans for organizing and conducting institutes.

6. To prescribe rules and regulations for the sanitary inspection of school buildings, and for the examination of pupils in order to detect contagious and infectious diseases and physical defects, and to take such other action as may seem necessary and expedient to promote the physical welfare of school children.

7. To classify and standardize the public schools and colleges, to provide for new forms of educational effort, and in general to take such action as may seem necessary to promote the organization and increase the efficiency of the educational system of the state.

It will be noted that two especially important and effective functions were to be fulfilled by this proposed board: first, the function of distributing the school fund, and second, the function of examining teachers. The remaining functions were largely of an advisory character, but it is clear that the advice given by a board that distributes the school fund and virtually certifies all teachers becomes effectually prescriptive. Without these two powers the proposed board would have been quite without effective influence over the schools which it was supposed to supervise. It was undoubtedly the teachers' examination clause that led to the defeat of the bill in which the recommendations of the commission were embodied.

Bulletin No. 2 proposes some needed reforms in the county superintendency. At the present time the county superintendency is the most influential educational agency in the state, and yet the office is safeguarded by absolutely no legal qualifications in respect of scholarship or professional training. As the commission points out, it is, to say the least, inconsistent to prescribe definite qualifications for the certifying of

teachers and still make no provision for similar or greater qualifications in the examining and certificating officer. The commission proposed that no one should be eligible to the position of county superintendent who did not hold at least a state supervisory certificate. It also recommended strongly the organization of county boards of education, which should bear the same relation to the county superintendents as the proposed state board of education would bear to the state superintendent of public instruction. At the present time each county superintendent prepares the questions for his own examinations, grades the papers, and issues the certificates.

The commission elaborated its recommendations regarding the certification of teachers in Bulletin No. 3. It proposed an equitable division of responsibility among the county superintendents, the state superintendent, and the state board of education. County certificates were to be issued by the county superintendents, and these officials were empowered to revoke certificates for cause. A similar power was proposed for the state superintendent with regard to state certificates. The state board of education, however, was to prepare all questions, grade all papers, fix a uniform date for county examinations, and determine the time and place for state examinations. It should be remarked in passing that all teachers in the public schools of Illinois under the existing law as well as under the proposed plan are licensed only by examination, neither normal-school nor university diplomas exempting the candidates from such examinations.

The certification plan proposed by the commission was well adapted to insure the caution essential in licensing teachers and at the same time prevent real teaching talent from becoming ineffective through an overplus of "red tape." Four classes of county certificates were proposed: elementary, high-school, kindergarten, and special. Elementary certificates were to be of first, second, and third grade, varying with the experience, academic preparation, and professional training of the applicant, and valid for three years, two years, and one year respectively. It was further proposed that the third-grade certificate should

not be issued after July 1, 1913; this provision would have made it impossible after that date for anyone to obtain a certificate to teach in the schools of Illinois without the equivalent of a high-school education. High-school certificates were to be of two types, one valid for one year, and the other for three years. All were to be renewable under certain conditions and for limited periods, and all except the third-grade, the elementary, and the limited high-school were to be transferable from county to county upon the indorsement of the county superintendent.

The state certificates were to be a life elementary, a life high-school, and a supervisory. The life elementary certificate was to be granted only to normal-school graduates upon examination, and after three years' teaching on a first-grade elementary certificate. The high-school certificate was to be granted only to college and university graduates under similar conditions. Supervisory certificates were to be issued in two grades, varying with experience and professional training, the second-grade valid for five years, and the first-grade valid for life, with the provision, however, that the latter should lapse after three years if the holder ceased to engage in educational work.

Another of the commission's bulletins (No. 5) is likewise of general value. This embodies the findings and recommendations relative to teachers' institutes. At the present time the state supervision of teachers' institutes in Illinois is merely nominal, the state superintendent of public instruction being empowered simply to indorse the institute instructors who are employed by the county superintendents. Attendance upon the institutes is not compulsory, and there is no law compelling districts to pay teachers while in attendance, except when the institutes are held during the regular school year. The commission did not propose to relieve the county superintendents of the responsibility for the conduct of the institutes, but it did recommend that a state institute director be employed to assist the superintendents in organizing and conducting institutes, to prepare courses of instruction, and to devise general

plans for increasing the economy and efficiency of the work. It also recommended that institutes be held within the school year instead of during the summer vacation, as is now almost invariably the rule in Illinois. Attendance, it urged, should be made compulsory and should entitle the teacher to full pay during the institute period, this part of the expense of the institutes being borne by the districts employing the teachers. The salaries of the instructors and the general expenses involved, however, should be met by a grant from the state of \$300 for each county, any further expenditure being borne by the county itself. In order to insure a uniformly high grade of instruction for all institutes, the Commission recommended that a list of approved instructors should be prepared by the state superintendent, from which the county superintendents should select the instructors desired for each institute.

In Bulletin No. 4 the commission recommended the adoption of the township unit of school organization, urging the enactment of an amendment which would place schools in districts not governed by boards of education (that is, in districts not in town and city systems) under the control of township boards of trustees. The analysis of the data gathered from various parts of the country and the admirable presentation of the arguments for and against the various units of school organization make Bulletin No. 4 an educational document of much more than local significance.

Probably the most important work of the commission—certainly the most effective work—is the codification of the school law of Illinois, which is embodied in Bulletin No. 6. Governor Deneen, in urging the appointment of the commission, had characterized the school law of Illinois as so cumbersome and contradictory in its provisions that no lawyer, not to say layman, could pretend to know and understand it. The commission deserves the highest praise for the skill with which it reduced this legal entanglement to system and order without altering the meaning or omitting an essential feature of the original enactments. In view of the failure of the Assembly to act favorably upon most of the recommendations,

it is gratifying to know that at least this codification will stand as a monument to the labors of the commission.

Bulletin No. 7 deals with the question of teachers' salaries. After a brief summary of statistics and review of the minimum-salary legislation of other states, the commission recommended (1) that the minimum school year be increased from six months to seven, with full allowance to teachers for legal holidays and time spent in attendance upon institutes; and (2) the adoption of a minimum-salary schedule providing that the wages of teachers holding second-grade certificates should be at least \$45 a month, or \$315 a year, and of teachers holding first-grade certificates, \$55 a month, or \$385 a year. A further clause was also recommended providing for state aid to townships which could not, after levying the maximum school tax permitted by law, pay the minimum salaries and maintain their schools for the required terms.

That the commission felt that it was building for the future rather than preparing for the immediate institution of all its proposed reforms is evinced by the fact that it proposed only three bills for action by the forty-sixth General Assembly. These bills embodied its recommendations with regard (1) to the establishment of a state board of education, (2) to the certification of teachers, and (3) to the township organization of rural schools. It is a matter of regret that none of these bills became law.

It is gratifying to note, however, that the labors of the commission were not in vain. Aside from the codification of the school law (in itself a noteworthy achievement), the general discussion of the various questions involved showed that the people of the state had been reached and interested. The inadequacies of the existing school situation were made known in a wider circle than would otherwise have been possible, for the conservative forces were compelled to come out from behind the bulwarks of tradition and fight in the open.

The commission will be continued and its proposals will be revised and presented to the next General Assembly.